

Granger Music Hall
1700 East Fourth St.
National City
San Diego County
California

HABS No. CA-1998

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CAL.
37-NATC,
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PHOTOGRAPHS

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

WRITTEN ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

GRANGER MUSIC HALL

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Location: 1700 East 4th Street
National City, San Diego County, California

Present Owner: South Bay Historical Society (on land leased from the city of National City)

Present Use: The building is being restored for use as a music hall.

Significance: The Granger Music Hall, constructed in the 1890s by silver baron Ralph Granger, was an ambitious and highly original attempt to provide a grand setting for musical events in a California town. Great care was lavished on the structure's decoration. Between 1898 and 1906 the hall was the site of concerts by world famous musicians. It was moved to its present site in November 1969.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Legal description of the property: Portion of quarter section 130, Rancho de la Nacion.
2. Date of erection: 1896-1898. The entrance vestibule was originally constructed as a detached music room on the Granger estate in 1896. According to the June 21, 1896, San Diego Union, plans were at that time being considered for the room which was to have been "very unique and attractive in design. Special attention will be given to the acoustic qualities of the room." By August 21, 1896, the room was finished and the San Diego Union of that date reported that a concert had been given the night before.
3. Architect: Irving John Gill
4. Original plans and construction: No original plans are known. A succinct description was given in the aforementioned August 21, 1896 issue of the San Diego Union:

"The room which is just across the driveway from the manion, was designed by architect Irving J. Gill of this city. The room is 19 x 36, lighted from above, and the general effect is simple and elegant. The wood used is Port Oxford cedar, rubbed to a satiny effect. The ceiling has no

supports to stop the vibrations and the floor likewise runs across without girders under the joists. Everything is designed to secure the best sound effect, and the result is very satisfactory. Mr. Gill designed the room after Mr. Granger's own ideas with the result that famous violinists coming to San Diego will find a place dedicated to their art that is sure to win their heartiest praise."

5. Alterations and additions: In 1898 the auditorium was added, and the original building became its vestibule. The April 17, 1898 issue of the San Diego Union noted that Ralph Granger had accepted plans for an extension to his music room. Though the architect was not named, there is no reason to doubt that Gill was the signer of the addition, which is done in very much the same style, and is quite close in date to the original structure. In addition, Granger's daughter, Rachael Hastings Wegeforth, who has a good memory of her father's relations with Gill, recalls that the building was designed by Gill. (Interview, July 23, 1975, Robert Bruegmann with Rachael Hastings Wegeforth.)

The walls of the auditorium are quite unusual in their construction, employing sheathing on both sides of the studs, making a wall nearly 10 inches thick. This was probably done to insulate the hall from exterior noises.

The interior decoration by all accounts was lavish for so modest a building. Especially ambitious was a large ceiling painting using allegorical figures painted in oil on canvas by an artist from either Chicago or New York. The name of this artist is said to be D. Samman, and he was commissioned to come to National City to do the work and paint the scenes on canvas. Plaster decorations were finished in gold leaf and the walls in linen.

Lester Wegeforth, a grandson of Granger, described the intricate construction in an article published in Console magazine, July 1967:

"The building is a marvel of architectural engineering. Under the linen wall surface is plaster, then lath, and under this is a tongue-and-groove of one-inch stock that is laid solid top to bottom. It is nailed to six by sixes put on 12" centers. On the outside is another set of tongue-and-groove one-inch stock running up and down covered by a shingle facing. The

structure is absolutely sound proof. Designed so that no two walls or surfaces are parallel, the floor slopes forward from the back of the auditorium approximately six inches. The ceiling and walls have a slight canter which was done deliberately for the accoustics."

Some of these refinements cannot be verified by the construction seen in the building as it now stands

Wegeforth also noted the organ in the same organ:

"Murray M. Harris, who was at that time the leading organ building on the west coast, was contacted by my grandfather and given the contract to build the pipe organ. It was intended primarily to be used to accompany the various artists who appeared in the hall. However, it was a very complete instrument and, according to the original contract, cost \$3,200."

The organ was later destroyed by vandals.

Another feature of the building was a safe in a room off what is nows the entrance vestibule. This room housed a major collection of violins.

When the building was moved from 260 E. 8th Avenue to its present site in 1969, it was necessary to construct new foundations, footings for the posts supporting the floor, and a new chimney. A series of fires has also destroyed many of the original exterior shingles. These are being replaced. The original chimneypiece ws stolen and another chimneypiece has been substituted. Currently under construction are new men and women's rooms in the rear of the building.

- B. Historical Context: Ralph Granger was a New Englander who made a fortune at the Last Chance Silver Mine in Colorado. Granger moved to southern California in April 1892 and bought land in National City which he enlarged over the years for his citrus orchards. In 1896 Granger was rich enough to indulge his passion for music and, according to local sources, acquired the Hawley Collection of violins. He constructed his hall and arranged to have many of the world's famous musicians appear in the hall, including Rudolph Friml, Fritz Kreisler, Eugene Ysaye, Paderewski. After Granger's house

burned in 1906, he moved to San Diego and the hall was closed until 1954, when it was reopened for several years. Granger died in 1937.

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Summer 1975

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. Description of exterior:

1. Number of stories: The music hall is a one-story structure; however, the auditorium is four steps lower than the vestibule.
2. Overall dimensions: The vestibule measures 44'-3" x 19'-5". The auditorium measures 81'-0" x 31'-8".
3. Layout, shape: The auditorium is rectangular with the vestibule, also rectangular, at right angles to it.
4. Foundations: As the building has been recently moved, it is presently sitting on a new concrete block foundation, to conform to local building codes. The interior loads are transferred to the earth by 4x4 posts on concrete footings.
5. Wall construction: The stud construction of the auditorium has 5-1/2" wide studs which are sheathed on both sides with 5-1/2" x 3/4" tongue-and-grooved boards. The interior wall surface is lath and plaster, the lath being nailed to 1" x 2" runners which in turn are nailed to the boards. The studs in the foyer are not so wide and the interior is paneled rather than plastered.
6. Structural framing system: The auditorium is spanned by wooden trusses approximately five feet apart. The bottom cord is two 2x8s, separated by a 2" space. The cord is nailed to the rafters, and does not rest on the wall plate. The king post, sandwiched between the bottom cord, measures 2" x 6" and joins the 2" x 8" rafters. The king post and rafters appear to be connected by a mortice and tenon joint. The diagonal struts are 2" x 6". All other joints appear to be lapped and nailed.
7. Porches: The porches are new concrete and masonry block constructions, but the bracketed canopies are original. One is centered in the southeast facade of the foyer, and a nearly identical one is located on the southeast elevation of the

auditorium at the south corner. The ridge of the canopy projects at right angles from the building. The shingles are nailed to runners which rest on four rafters with flared ends. The rafters, in turn, rest on two 6" x 6" boards, supported by large brackets. The brackets rest on short pilasters.

8. Chimneys: There is one chimney, measuring 2'-3" x 1'-6", located on the northwest elevation. This is a red brick outside end chimney with a cap that corbels out at each of its four corners.
9. Openings:
 - a. Doorways: The main entrance to the music hall is through a doorway located centrally in the southeast facade of the vestibule. There are two stage doors located in the auditorium, one at the south corner of the southeast elevation, and one at the north corner of the northeast elevation. Two of the doors measure 4' x 7"; the northeast door is only 2'-11" and 3/4" x 7'. The four foot doors display four tiers of moulded panels.
 - b. Windows: The windows in the southeast and northwest elevations of the auditorium are elliptical, single paned with moulded trim. The vestibule is lit by clerestory windows with diamond panes. The small addition to the north has two double hung, one-over-one sash windows.
10. Roof:
 - a. Shape: Both rectangles have hip roofs with flared eaves, covered with composition roofing.
 - b. Cornice: The rafter ends are exposed and cut in a double curve.
 - c. Dormers: The vestibule has both hip and shed dormers, the cornice details being identical to that of the main roof. The auditorium also has a high dormer on its northwest slope.

B. Description of interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. Vestibule: The plan consists of one large room with a small office addition in the rear (north). A fireplace is centered in the southwest wall. The northeast wall opens

out to connect with the auditorium. The stairway, consisting of four risers, descends and is centered in this opening. The stair is flanked by balusters and ornamental lattice work.

- b. Auditorium: The auditorium is also one large space. At the northeast end of the room is a curved stage with a carved backdrop for the organ which was behind it.

2. Flooring: Wood

3. Wall and ceiling finish:

- a. Vestibule: The vestibule has wainscoting with vertical tongue-and-groove paneling above. The width of the paneling varies between 1-1/2 and 1-3/4 inches. The wainscoting below the chair rail has two tiers of recessed panels and a moulded baseboard. The ceiling is also of tongue-and-groove paneling and is coved. There are translucent glass panes framed into the ceiling to allow light from the clerestories to reach the vestibule.
- b. Auditorium: The auditorium has wainscoting similar to that of the vestibule. The wall is stenciled plaster. Stenciled swags run around the entire room just below the cornice moulding. Garlands and ribbons adorn the ceiling cove. The top of the cove is defined by an inch-round plaster moulding. Another moulding parallels the first at a distance of about 16", and to half-encircle the ceiling vents. Garlands and ribbons adorn the area between the two plaster ceiling moulds. The ceiling mural is painted on canvas. The mural is thus described by Jeanette Branin in her article "Sleeping Beauty of Paradise Valley:

"The muse of music, Euterpe, is the central figure of the design, represented as a serene dark-tressed maiden, dressed in flower-sprigged robes that shade from violet through mauve to pale pink. She holds a stylus and a roll of music. At her feet romp two of the fifteen winged cherubs depicted in the painting, all uniformly plump, pink cheeked, golden haired. Her handmaiden, probably the muse Erats, sits behind her lyre. The cherubs, which circle through the blue cloud drifted sky, carry tamborines, pan pipes, mandolins, and, of course, a violin."

4. Special decorative features: Four fluted columns flank the stairs connecting the vestibule and auditorium. The two spaces are also separated by a screen supported by the columns and pilasters (at the walls). The bottom panel consists of slender turned balusters, the top panel of a diagonal pattern of turned spindle elements. The stage backdrop is another decorative feature of the music hall. Four fluted columns are on a platform, below which are carved panels of foliated scrolls, surrounded by egg and dart moulding. Between the fluted columns are pierced screens (the original organ case). These columns support an entablature with a pierced frieze and a small, decorative arcade above.

C. Site and surrounding: The main (southeast) facade faces 4th Street.

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PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

1. Old Views: There are at least twelve old views of both exterior and interior in the collection of the San Diego Historical Society at the Serra Museum. These have been photocopied for the HABS collection and are numbered CA-1998-1 through CA-1998-65 in the photographs accompanying this report.
2. Bibliography
 - a. Primary sources:

Granger, Ralph, "My Story." Interview with Lucia Hastings, 1934, handwritten, National City Library

"San Diego, Our Italy," San Diego, 1895. Describes the arrival of Ralph Granger to southern California.

National City Record, April 21, 1898. Notice that Granger was expanding his music hall.

San Diego Union, June 21, 1896, p. 5, col. 1: plans drawn up for music building. April 21, 1896, p. 5, col. 2: a musical given in the new building. April 17, 1898, p. 5, col. 1: plans accepted for extension. July 26, 1898, p. 5, col. 4; August 17, 1898, p. 5, col. 1, and August 18, 1898, p. 3, col. 1: on the new organ.

b. Secondary sources:

B'hend, Thomas, "Music Hall in the Country," The Console, July 1967, pp. 1-8. This article contains a lengthy interview with Lester Wegeforth, grandson of Ralph Granger, part of which has been quoted in this report.

Biggs, N. S., "Inspection Report, proposed relocation and occupancy of Granger," Department of Building and Housing, August 5, 1969, in National City Civic Center, on file. Contains a description of the building shortly before moving.

Branin, Jeannette, "Sleeping Beauty of Paradise Valley," San Diego Magazine, June-July, 1955

Phillips, Irene, National City: Pioneer Town, National City, 1960, pp. 74-75. Newspaper article collected in Irene Phillips' scrapbook and Mabel Small's scrapbook copies in National City Library and Serra Museum. "A Silver Baron who built a house of golden music," San Diego Union Tribune, June 6, 1965, is most important. Irene Phillips collected a great deal of material on the Granger Music Hall, presumably from the old newspapers in the National City Library; however, article dates are rarely given and the material is usually paraphrased rather than quoted.

c. Interviews

Interview with Rachael Hastings Wegeforth, July 22, 1975. (Interview conducted by Robert Brueggmann, HABS Historian).